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ABSTRACT

This monograph discusses prejudice which exists when humans evaluate others. No one sees or hears a man evaluating. One hears or sees only what he says and does. An arbitrary sampling of recent research studies which indicate some of the varieties of mis-evaluation are cited. They reveal that sometimes people show antipathy to people they do not know and that some people say things about others which are just not so. It is one of the curiosities of everyday speech that a person can be making Inference Statements (statements which refer to factors and considerations which are outside the immediate acquaintance of the speaker) when he sounds as though he were talking about something observable. Sometimes people will speak with the force and assurance of the factual when the mood ought more properly reflect a certain tentativeness, an unsureness. The sound of factuality does not establish the factuality of an utterance. Another evaluation oddity which must be noted because it so often shows the departure from the factual is the practice of paying more attention to what a person is called than to the person. It occurs whenever we neglect a man to focus on the way we have named or labelled him. It is one of the commonplaces of studies in semantics that a number of words may refer to the same thing though each may imply strikingly different attitudes to it. A story is told about the way a Greek communist newspaper reported some remarks of Paul Porter, made at a banquet in Macedonia while on an economic mission. He said, "It is indeed a pleasure to be here tonight with you good citizens of Greece. You Greeks and we Americans have very much in common. We like to eat. We like to drink. And we like to sit around and talk." The newspaper said, "Ambassador Porter said that we are just like Americans, gluttons, drunkards, and gossips." (Author/RM)

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HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT PEOPLE?

By IRVING J. LEE

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FOURTH EDITION

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Until his death in 1955, one of the nation's leading authorities in the field of semantics, Irving J. Lee was professor of public speaking at the School of Speech of Northwestern University. He served as president of the International Society of General Semantics and as a fellow and trustee of the Institute of General Semantics.

Dr. Lee also worked with the Northwestern University Traffic Institute and lectured widely on problems of training and education in safety and supervisory work. He served with the Army Air Forces from 1942 to 1946, ending with the rank of major.

A graduate of New York University (1931), he received his Ph.D. from Northwestern (1938). His major publications included: *Language Habits in Human Affairs,* Harper, 1941; *A Way with Prejudice,* Social Action Pamphlet, Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches, 1942; *Speaking Straight—Thinking Straight,* National Safety Council, 1949, and the notable *The Language of Wisdom and Folly,* Harper, 1949; and numerous other articles in professional journals.

Dr. Lee's major researches were on the problem of conflict in communications. This Freedom Pamphlet, *How Do You Talk About People?,* represents the findings of his many years of research and experience.

CONVERSATION

"For twenty years I've been talking to people about their prejudices, but in the last five years I seem to be making less headway," he said. "They listen to me, but I have the feeling they are not paying attention. They're being kind rather than receptive. Do you suppose they are tired of the old themes? Have they been hearing about good will, neighborliness, forbearance, love of fellow-man so much that they have become immune? Do we need some new ideas?"

"I can't answer those questions," I said, "but would you mind if I asked one? Preaching is the great instrument for reaffirming an audience's existing beliefs. But is it possible that it is not so good for changing beliefs? It is such a direct assault on the listener that maybe it builds resistance. If you have learned to dislike something, won't my telling you that you should like it make you wonder about me rather than my idea? Would it do any good to attack the way a man thinks about people? What would happen if you showed him how to think about his own thinking?"

"I don't know," he said. "Why don't you answer your own question?"

ON HUMAN EVALUATION

The metaphors for Man are many. He is a rational animal, the son of God, culture-builder, profit-seeker, time-binder. He is also an evaluating man.

I once watched a man prepare to fell a dying tree. He seemed to spend hours looking at it, the distance between it and the house, the space between it and another smaller tree. He paced back and forth over three routes. He gestured, sighted, measured. He finally came to a decision. He hacked away at a spot on the tree trunk, after which he began to saw.

Before the cutting, the man was sizing-up the situation, looking it over, taking account of it, analyzing, considering, thinking-feeling-imagining in some way about it. He was, in short, *evaluating* the dying tree—house—small tree—road situation.

The tree fell where he wanted it to and where he figured it would. He told me that nothing happened which he had not calculated for. He had noted and predicted well. This kind of evaluating seems mature, sensible, discerning, productive. This is *proper* evaluation.

Human evaluation is not always so. Sometimes a man mistakes, distorts, confuses. Sometimes both his sighting and his figuring are askew. Sometimes a man *mis*-evaluates by his haphazard, superficial, or eccentric mode of approach to a situation. And when there is something wrong with a man's evaluating, we must not expect the tree to fall without hurt to something or someone.

No one sees or hears a man evaluating. One hears or sees only what he says and does. It is convenient, nevertheless, to suppose that something goes on inside him. Who knows the workings of electricity? The effects are plain but "it" works deeply hidden in wires and tubes. To assume "a certain kind of something" gives a starting point for predicting what will happen when a switch is turned on. If we assume that certain things go on in the nervous system, we can also assume that when "it" is of a certain sort, then the talking and acting will be of a certain sort. If we suppose that the current alternates thus and so, then this rather than that kind of engine will turn. In much the same way might we not assume that one way of sizing-up people inevitably goes with breakdowns in human relations?

A catalogue of the breakdowns in human affairs would have many pages. It would include items like the denial of opportunities for work, housing, voting and education. It would have listings of the varieties of ostracism, dismissal and exclusion from private and public activities. There would be stories of beatings, stonings, shootings, lynchings. Somehow, such behavior does not seem to go with discernment and maturity. Something seems wrong with evaluation which ends in human disaster.

What is there in the human reckoning which produces the mischief?

If we could but understand the workings of mis-evaluation in

a social test tube, we might get a perspective for the larger disruptions. Let us, then, look at a rather arbitrary sampling of research studies made in recent years.

In a survey* of 10,000 Lutheran congregations made by the Department for the Christian Approach to the Jewish People of the National Lutheran Council, it was discovered "that congregations having no contact with Jews show, on the average, more undesirable attitudes than congregations which do have such contact."[1]

After studying the development of attitudes toward Negroes among white children in the North and South, an investigator came to this conclusion in 1936: "It seems that attitudes toward Negroes are now chiefly determined not by contacts with Negroes, but by contact with the prevalent attitude toward Negroes."[2]

An analysis of children whose ages ranged from 9 to 18 showed that though they had no direct, first-hand acquaintance with members of minority groups, they, nevertheless, had strongly organized beliefs against them.[3]

> Research studies indicate that people in all parts of the United States feel that the least desirable ethnic and racial groups are the Japanese, the Negroes, and the Turks. When asked to characterize the Turk, they have no difficulty in speaking of him as bloodthirsty, cruel and dirty; yet the great majority who make this judgment not only have never seen a Turk but do not know anyone who has.[4]

A social psychologist gave a slightly modified form of the Bogardus Social Distance Test to some 600 students in eight eastern colleges in an effort to learn their attitudes toward each of 49 groups, including Latvian, Arab, Atheist, Roman Catholic, Swiss. He included in the list the names of three groups "completely unknown in reality" — Danireans, Pireneans and Wallonians. On the average, the college students expressed as much unwillingness to associate with these as with any of the other 46 groups.[5]

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* It is not suggested that this or any of the studies cited here cover what has been found by the many researchers in this field. This particular sampling is intended only to indicate some of the varieties of mis-evaluation which have been reported. For a full account of national opinion and attitude studies on anti-Semitism, see Arnold Forster, *A Measure of Freedom* (Doubleday & Co., Inc.) New York, 1950, Chapter VI; or Arnold Forster & Benjamin R. Epstein, *Cross-Currents* (Doubleday & Co., Inc.) New York, 1956, Chapters I-IV; or Benjamin R. Epstein & Arnold Forster, *Some of My Best Friends . . .* (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, Inc.) New York, 1962.

A study of a western Pennsylvania community revealed that about two-thirds of the white population had anti-Negro attitudes and believed that the Negroes who lived there had less education than they did. "The fact is that the Negroes and whites in that community have precisely the same degree of education."[6]

The Philadelphia Early Childhood Project is the source of reports that the talk of some 400 5- to 7-year-old children includes remarks like these: "Negroes kill people. Sometimes when people are coming out of the movies they slug them. They go in beer saloons and get drunk." "You'd be afraid of them 'cause some are real dark." "They'se bad. They have all kinds of diseases all over them."[7]

An analysis of an opinion poll of May, 1944 "shows that whites who believe that Negro blood is different from white blood are more inclined to favor various types of economic discrimination against Negroes than are whites who believe Negro and white blood are the same."[8]

> We did a study in a border state between North and South to try to find out something about where white children got their varying attitudes toward Negroes. We interviewed the children, varying in ages, and used such indirect techniques as asking them about punishments:
>
> When you are naughty, who punishes you? What sort of punishments do you get? When was the last time you were whipped? Why? The children reported that the most frequent cause for being whipped was for slipping off and playing with near-by colored children. As part of the same study, though a little later on, we went around talking to the parents, asking them—among many other things that we talked to about them—what the origin was of their children's attitudes toward Negroes. We asked where the children got their prejudices—though, of course, we did not call them 'prejudices' when talking in that community. The parents told us that the children seemed to have taken on prejudice without any teaching at all—that they had always thought this way about Negroes. The parents forgot completely that they had had any part at all in instilling, with a birch rod, these attitudes into the children.[9]

Here is something strange indeed. Some people dislike non-existing people. Sometimes people show antipathy to people they do not know. Some people say things about others which are just not so. These people were exposed to situations, they sized them up, and they reacted in a foolish way. Where did they go wrong? How can their *mis-evaluations* be charted?

TWO KINDS OF STATEMENTS

When a lighting system breaks down, the electrician has a number of things to look for. When human relationships break down, it is not so easy to find the blown fuse or the torn wire. There is, however, a point from which study can begin: Is there anything in the character of the talking which might suggest something amiss in the evaluating?

There was a rose in my garden which bloomed in the middle of June. Because it was the first of all that I had planted, I wanted a picture of it.

The six-year-old daughter of a neighbor came by while I was setting up the camera. She asked what I was doing. I told her and pointed to the rose. In the next five minutes she asked many questions and said many things. Why is this the first one? Will there be more like it? It doesn't smell much. Will it be here tomorrow when I come home from school? Did you make it grow? I bet my Daddy has a flower like that.

I finally took the picture. The camera caught the flower in a very rich moment. The outer ring of petals curved symmetrically. The inner ones had just begun their outward arching. Something of the deep coloring came through. There was much in the picture—and in a sense very little. The camera registered only what it "saw." Beyond that "sensory" acquaintance it could "say" nothing.

Compare that with my little friend's response. She was able to range far beyond physical acquaintance to matters of purpose, explanation, prediction. She was moved to wonder and theory into dimensions not bound by the senses. Her nervous system is

no simple, camera-like recording device but one that is magnificently creative as well. She could see the rose but she could wonder about it too.

The difference between the achievements of the camera and those of my little friend can be formulated in terms of two kinds of statements.

Observation Statements

These statements refer to details, aspects, or characteristics of anything which human beings can be aware of directly. Such statements represent what can be studied or known by the senses. An Observation Statement implies a set of relationships between things, happenings or people with which one is acquainted. It can be made only *after* acquaintance. It usually suggests that such and such happened, or that particular features were found, or that such and such can be recognized. The maker of this kind of statement usually implies that if someone else had been where he was, responding as he did, that other person would have made much the same statements. The Observation Statement is a way of pointing to something which another person could also point to were he similarly stationed and equipped. It, in effect, stands for what a camera is exposed to.

Inference Statements

These statements refer to factors and considerations which are outside the immediate acquaintance of the speaker. They go beyond what can be directly observed. They, in effect, add details to those implied by Observation Statements. Inference Statements fill in what is not apparent in a situation and fill out what is not provided in the description. They imply that something will happen when now it can only be said that it has not yet happened. They involve the belief that something is the case when that something is not in the range of acquaintance.

These are the statements made about what is as yet unknown and what can only be guessed at—about the beyond when one is merely here, about what happened when no one was near. These are the statements a man makes most frequently when he asserts causation, talks of motives, makes predictions, attempts explana-

tions in the absence of observation. Inference Statements imply that such and such may with some chance have happened, or that some indicated features may possibly be found, or that such and such might yet be recognized. If Observation Statements imply with a great deal of confidence that such and such was the case, Inference Statements imply with varying degrees of probability that such and such may have been or may be or may become the case.

It is one of the curiosities of everyday speech that a person can be making Inference Statements when he sounds as though he were talking about something observable.

For example, look at an apple with its skin intact. You now can say, "There are seeds in this apple." Your sentence has the form and sound of the factual. It is exactly what you might say *after* you had cut it open and found seeds there. But before the investigation the statement has only the status of the inferential. Of course, if you have had experience with many apples you might say, "They all had seeds. The evidence is overwhelming. This one will have seeds, too." The first sentence can be considered factual. The third should not be so considered. It is rather a statement of very great probability—so great that it would be "safe" to bet on it. Nevertheless it is not yet a statement of fact in the terms here set out.

There is a story of the Austrian farmer who insisted that fish hear. Before feeding the trout in the local pond, he sounded a bell. After a while he had but to appear at meal time, swing the bell and the fish came. "The fish heard me," he used to say with assurance. That, indeed, sounds factual, but factually, it was possible to say only that "the fish came when the bell sounded." That hearing might not be involved became clearer when a skeptic went to the pond's edge at feeding time and merely swung his arms. After a few tries the hungry trout assembled just as they did to the bell.

In order to make a statement of fact about the hearing capacities of the trout, we must be sure that the statement does not go beyond what can be observed. There is no harm in going beyond so long as we recognize that we are then in the area of the inferential, and that our inference must be verified before it becomes fact.

The man had staggered as he entered the drug store. His speech was indistinct and the gestures he made with his right hand seemed uncertain. The woman at the cashier's desk called to the counter-man, "Bill, that man is drunk. Please get him out of here." Bill moved to ease the "drunkard" out of the store, but he was struck by a pattern in the man's talking, "Pocket chocolate--chocolate pocket." "Out of curiosity I reached into his coat pocket," Bill said later, "and found a couple of candy cubes. He stuck them into his mouth and we kept on walking to the street. By the time I got to the back of the store, he had come back in walking as straight as anyone. He thanked me for helping. He thought maybe he'd taken a little too much insulin, and the chocolate was needed to stop the shock."

Note now the woman's statement, "That man is drunk." It has the form and sound of a factual statement. She could see the stagger and the gesturings, but when she assumed a cause, she ventured into the probable. This is not to say that one is to avoid such assumptions. It is to say that there is a difference between the factual and the inferential and the one should not be made as if it were the other.

> President Eliot of Harvard enjoyed telling the story of an experience he once had, illustrating proper caution in drawing a conclusion. When he entered a crowded New York restaurant, he handed his hat to the doorman. As he came out he was astonished to see the doorman promptly pick his hat out of the hundreds there and hand it to him. In his surprise he asked, 'How did you know that was my hat?' 'I didn't know it was your hat, sir,' was the answer. 'Why, then,' asked Mr. Eliot, 'did you hand it to me?' Very courteously the doorman replied, 'Because you handed it to me, sir.' This precise limitation of inference pleased the president.[10]

Textbooks in grammar conventionally take note of the declarative as one of the common sentence types. They do not as often make clear, however, that the declarative structure can be used when the statement applies to what is assumed as well as to what is observed. It is to be expected, therefore, that on occasion people will speak with the force and assurance of the factual when the mood ought more properly reflect a certain tentativeness, an unsureness. For after all, when a person is guessing or

reflecting on what may be the case, should he not show some hesitation, or at the very least some indication that he is in the realm of the not-yet-certain?

This distinction would be of no more than academic interest did not so many people believe that when they make declarative statements they are necessarily talking factually. This belief in the factual character of their statements in turn leads them to proceed all too readily without a care for whether they are staying with or going beyond the things they are talking about. When a man talks in the declarative mood, and if he believes that is the mood of the observational, why should he ever stop to wonder about his talking?

The next time you hear someone sounding off about who owns what or about what one people can do which another cannot, or about the dangerous intentions of this or that group, listen for the note of factual finality. It is conceivable that the statements could satisfy the requirements of the observational, but the assertive mood may just as readily cover up what is merely probable. The sound of factuality does not establish the factuality of an utterance.

BEYOND THE WORD

I knew a man who had lost the use of both eyes. He was called a "blind man." He could also be called an expert typist, a conscientious worker, a good student, a careful listener, a man who wanted a job. But he couldn't get a job in the department store order room where employees sat and typed orders which came over the telephone. The personnel man was impatient to get the interview over. "But you're a blind man," he kept saying, and one could almost feel his silent assumption that somehow the incapacity in one aspect made the man incapable in every other. So blinded by the label was the interviewer that he could not be persuaded to look beyond it.

Here is an evaluational oddity which must be noted because

it so often shows the departure from the factual. It is the practice of paying more attention to what a person is called than to the person. It occurs whenever we neglect a man to focus on the way we have named or labelled him. It is as if upon learning that a man is an Inlander, we immediately assume that he possesses the full complement of characteristics which we have learned to associate with Inlanders. The moment one presumes to know what Inlanders are like, there is danger that those attributes will be automatically applied to any particular Inlander. The moment a speaker comes to believe that the classification gives him full knowledge of the man being classified, it will not be surprising if the speaker's comments range far into the conjectural.

If I tell you that the flower I can see from my window is a Cherokee Rose, i.e., *Rosa laevigata,* you know something about it, that it belongs to such and such genus, that it may have some similarity to others like it. But if you would know about this one, or make Observation Statements about it, you must look at it. If you were to say "Why bother? If it is a Cherokee Rose, it will be just like others of the same name," then you are no longer speaking factually. It is true that if two flowers can be said to belong to the same genus and species, there is good reason to assume that there will be many points of resemblance between them. The moment, however, we leave these simple realms to talk about people, we have no such surety. If two men have the name "Smith," would it be safe to assert that they would vote the same ticket? Or if two men are "Knights of Columbus," would you bet unlimited amounts on their reading habits? Nevertheless, you might be able with some confidence to say something about each pair, but no matter how assured you were, you will still be making statements involving assumptions when you leave that something behind.

Ernst Cassirer has summarized what is so often obscured in everyday speech:

> The function of a name is always limited to emphasizing a particular aspect of a thing, and it is precisely this restriction and limitation upon which the value of the name depends. It is not the function of a name to refer exclusively to a concrete situation, but merely to single out and dwell upon a certain aspect.[11]

It amounts to this. There is no way to name a man so that

every aspect of him is dealt with. Any name is a description of some aspect of him only. He is parent, citizen, lodge member, alumnus, church member, pedestrian, employee, union member, taxpayer, and/or a great deal more. If you know that a man can be classified in some way, you know something about him. If he is a movie actor, or a congressman or a labor leader or a naval officer or a high-school teacher or a cabinet member, you do have hold of a fractional piece of information about him. But as soon as you go from that little bit of data to assertions about other aspects of him, you have moved to the inferential.

It is hardly necessary to go as far as Dean Inge urges, but his last sentence is relevant:

> In matters which are really important, we must eschew labels as a snare of the devil. For example, in judging of a man's character, it is not fair to sum him up as a gambler, or a miser, or a wine-bibber. He may be what we call him; but he is many other things besides; the label is not descriptive of the man, but only of one corner of him.[12]

There would be little to talk about if we couldn't name things and people. The damage is not in the name-giving but in the concentration on it, in the fixation by which one is prevented from seeing the fullness and the unending number of other relations and characteristics which things and people have. It is the stopping at the named part and the freezing of it in consciousness that causes the trouble. And the moment one thinks of a man in terms of a single label only, then inference-making has full freedom.

Dr. William A. White was writing about physicians, but he comes to much the same conclusion:

> Giving something a name seems to have a deadening influence upon all our relations to it. It brings matters to a finality. Nothing further seems to need to be done. The disease has been identified. The necessity for further understanding of it has ceased to exist. And so classifications . . . had a sterilizing effect upon further inquiries. . . .[13]

What I am concerned with may, perhaps, involve the unnoticed habit of adding a silent "all the time." When a boy does poorly in his school work, it may make sense to characterize

him as "backward," and if when someone says, "He is backward," the boy could be thought about in the restricted circumstances in which the words fit, there would be no cause for concern. But if the tag is picked up by the undiscriminating, there is danger that "He is backward" may be interpreted "He is backward all the time." And that extension again moves to the inferential, for what is merely implied by the term becomes applied to the boy—outside of school.

When a boy has been called a "delinquent" because he has violated some law, the designation serves as a convenient shorthand for just that. This is the value of the name; it sums up quickly its equivalent, "He has violated the law and in court has been declared guilty of the charges made." But unless people are aware of the limited functions of a label, it will be all too easy to use the label to characterize the boy without limits. He will then be "a delinquent all over" or "a delinquent and nothing else," and if he is that, it is easy to forget that he is also a boy with his own complement of filial, educational, recreational, environmental, etc., relationships.

ON LOOKING AT LABELS

A story is told about the way a Greek communist newspaper reported some remarks of Paul Porter, made at a banquet in Macedonia while on an economic mission. He said, "It is indeed a pleasure to be here tonight with you good citizens of Greece. You Greeks and we Americans have very much in common. We like to eat. We like to drink. And we like to sit around and talk." The newspaper said, "Ambassador Porter said that we are just like Americans, gluttons, drunkards, and gossips."

It is one of the commonplaces of studies in semantics that a number of words may refer to the same thing though each may imply strikingly different attitudes to it. As someone once said, "When a poor fellow takes a piece of goods from a shop, it is called theft, but if a wealthy lady does the same thing it is called kleptomania." It has been more recently observed that "the rich are alcoholics and the poor are drunks." We learn rather quickly

to reserve some words for use when things are considered pleasant and desirable and others for the contrary. If you wished to express approval of someone would you not be likely to choose the former of the following pairs? Strength of purpose—pigheadedness; generous—spendthrift; zealot—fanatic; patriot—chauvinist; progressive—new-fangled; supporter of free enterprise—capitalist.

A language will include terms which can point to things as well as convey the speaker's attitude toward them. This is relevant to our concern with evaluation, because so many people seem prone to judge others in accordance with the attitudes which accompany the words they apply to them. They not only choose words which by custom come to reflect their positive or negative notions but they are in turn influenced to look at people or things in terms of the notions implied by the terms which are used.

The mis-evaluation comes about in this way: that one may apply to a person what is implied by the label while ignoring the person himself.

This is a way of saying that if you are oriented so that you do not know whether you are judging a man or whether you are thinking about him in the light of your limited classification, you are likely to be influenced by the approval or disapproval implied by the label. And you will be moved to think about the man in terms limited by the label even as you make it apply without limits to him.

But does this actually happen? Are there people who are thus influenced by what a name implies? Let us note some more studies.

When statements on various political questions were presented to 700 university students, night-school students, librarians, teachers and social workers, they responded with varying degrees of approval. Four weeks later, the same people were given a second questionnaire containing the same statements listed under headings of well-known classification terms. A significant number changed their answers from "yes" to "no" when the statements were linked to fascism, radicalism, and communism. The response, in short, was influenced by the "scare-word" rather than by the statement.[14]

It was found that more than 70 per cent of the subjects investigated in 1936 were agreed in their disapproval of "Nazi Germany" and its policies, but at the same time in response to a questionnaire many of them approved specific aspects of the program for which the Fascists stood.[15]

Individuals with liberal views on specific issues in the national election in 1928 followed the labels of the "Conservative" party. Just about half of those studied, who were among the most radical, endorsed a conservative candidate. "There is definite evidence that the responses of numerous individuals to political party labels are at marked variance with their responses to the ideas making up the corresponding party programs."[16]

Students were invited to judge the merit of a number of pictures. They rated each picture as the more beautiful when they thought it the work of a well-known painter than when it was supposed to be the work of an unknown.[17]

From a list of names of well-known people, students chose ten they uniformly liked and ten they disliked. Then thirty statements on controversial matters were given to three separate groups: one group was told the statements were approved by the ten people they liked; another group had the statements linked to the names of the people they disliked; and the third group had the statements presented without names. The statements were accepted or rejected in conformity with the response to the names of the people.[18]

Literary selections were weighted by the standing of the author. If Edgar Guest was said to be the author of a passage of Shakespeare, it was considered "poor"; but when authorship was attributed to Browning, it was considered "excellent." If a political notion was said to come from Marx, it was "false," if from Coolidge, "true."[19]

Subjects were asked to rate their preferences for 16 authors. A month later they evaluated 16 passages taken from one author, Stevenson, each of which was ascribed to one of the authors rated earlier. As the authors were rated inferior and superior, so were the passages. "The *name* of the author serves as a 'reference point' influencing the judgment of the merit of a passage ascribed to that *name*."[20]

Students were told to note carefully the shape of figures pre-

sented on a screen in order to be able to reproduce them later. The students were divided in two groups, each group being given a different list of recall phrases. When the figure was referred to "as the one that looked like an eight" in one group, it was referred to in the other "as the one that looked like a dumbbell." The students tended to shape the figures they reproduced in conformity with the "recall words" rather than in conformity with the stimulus figures.[21]

A series of colors were ranged by subjects on a pleasantness-unpleasantness scale. The same series was presented again accompanied by adjectives like "faded," "warm," "crude." Twenty-five of the 35 subjects changed their ranking of the colors under the influence of the verbal tags.[22]

1,484 persons listened to two "identical" recordings of a piece of classical music. One recording was said to be in a modern style and played by superior musicians. The other was described as being in a classical style. The assertions were supported by quotations from an imaginary article in a musical magazine which noted the difference in the two "interpretations." Sixty-seven per cent of the listeners preferred one of the recordings. Twenty per cent could not choose the better but agreed that the two were different. Only 4 per cent recognized that the recordings were the same.[23]

The influence of this evaluational malaise is nowhere more devastating than in the relations of people to other people. Let us take as a starting point this hypothesis: if the name of a people comes to have associations which are negative or unpleasant, then behavior toward individuals so named will partake of the attitudes implied without regard for the unique, personal qualities of the individuals. People will, in short, tend to discriminate against anyone so long as he is presumed to possess the characteristics defined by his label. People then no longer look at the man. Why should they, if they are already sure they know what he will be like?

Think of the word "Jew" for a moment. It is a word used in many ways. Let us note three quite differing sets of implications. First, this is the word used by some people to designate without overt approval or disapproval one who believes in or who makes certain "devout observances" or who belongs to a

certain family which does or did. Here the word is used to refer to a person in the same way that a chemist uses the word "uranium" to refer to an element having some indicated, verifiable characteristics. Secondly, the word "Jew" is used by some people to refer to someone with unacceptable beliefs, with "undesirable" behavior patterns, a threatening outsider. When the word is so used it serves to express the speaker's disapproval without necessarily describing the beliefs or behavior of those involved. Here it is a stigma word. Thirdly, some people use the word with overtones of approval. In their talk they reflect a set of implications which involve the establishment of moral law, the glory of a people who could survive the ordeal of undeserved suffering, a tradition which includes a host of great names before and after Jesus. Here there is also a halo around the word.

Now suppose a man can be designated "a Jew" because of his family origin; suppose, also, that this man is talked about by someone for whom "Jew" is a stigma word. We can learn something about the evaluation used by the second man by noting certain things: does the talking by the second man suggest that every aspect of the first man fits into the stereotyped stigma? Does the talk imply that the speaker knows all about the man without even looking? Does the talking point to someone presumed to be unpleasant?

When a man evaluates another according to what is implied by the label, that judgment may or may not fit. When it doesn't and when that man acts as if it does, we are in the presence of a man who judges easily and inferentially but not necessarily wisely. Arthur Miller documents our point with great acumen in this bit of dialogue from his novel, *Focus:*[24]

> "I'll tell you if you want me to," he said. "There's a lot of reasons why people don't like Jews. They have no principles for one thing."
>
> "No principles?"
>
> "Yes. In business you'll find them cheating and taking advantage, for instance. That's something that people . . ."
>
> "Let me understand. You're talking about me now?"
>
> "Well, no, not you, but . . ."
>
> "I ain't interested in other people, Mr. Newman. I live on this block and there ain't another Jew on this block but

me and my family. Did I ever cheat you in my business?"

"That's not the point. You . . ."

"I beg your pardon, sir. You don't have to explain to me that certain Jews cheat in business. There is no argument with that. Personally I know for a fact that the telephone company is charging five cents a local call when they could make a good profit charging a penny. This is a fact from the utilities investigation. The phone company is run and owned by gentiles. But just because you are a gentile I ain't mad at you when I put a nickel in to make a phone call. And still gentiles are cheating me. I am asking you why you want me to get off this block, Mr. Newman."

"You don't understand," Newman said shortly, pressing his trembling hand against his stomach. "It's not what YOU'VE done, it's what others of your people have done."

Mr. Finkelstein stared at him a long time. "In other words when you look at me you don't see me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I said. You look at me and you don't see me. You see something else. What do you see? That's what I don't understand. Against me you got nothing, you say. Then why are you trying to get rid of me? What do you see that makes you so mad when you look at me?"

THE COMPANION PIECE TO PREJUDICE

There is a sense in which this confusion of the observational and the inferential is a special kind of logical lapse. In a deeper sense, however, this mechanism may be at work whenever one pretends to an awareness he does not have, a knowledge he has not earned. We may have here a way of indicating what goes on when "false knowledge" is our guide. In his *Emile,* Rousseau warned:

> Remember, ever remember that ignorance has never been productive of evil, but that error alone is dangerous; and

that we do not miss our way through what we do not know, but through what we falsely think we know.

The easy departure from facts can be looked upon as a sort of momentary break in the usual exercise of good sense, an example of behavior which is stupid and which happens only occasionally. In a way it is. But it is also more than that. There is some reason to believe that unless individuals have somehow become aware of the possibilities of false knowledge, there is no way of determining whether in a given situation they will act in line with or in neglect of the facts. If a man comes upon a situation to which he will respond, we have no assurance that his response will be in terms of the facts rather than in terms of some distorted and imaginative version of them.

This is not the place to consider how rumors and myths can slander a people or how they can serve as arguments to justify discrimination. It may be germane, however, to question what is involved in such statements.

Is it possible to make a joke or a gibe at the expense of a religious or cultural or national group phrased in Observation Statements?

Has there ever been a declaration about a people's intellectual potentiality or their blood characteristics in comparison with those of another people which has not been characteristically inferential?

Can one generalize about the "irresponsibility of Negroes," "the stealthiness of Chinese," "the avariciousness of the Scotch" and still hold to requirements of factuality?

What Observation Statements can be made about the characteristics of any "family stock" which could give it privileged status?

Where can one find statements about the inferiority of members of one group or the superiority of another which square with what can be observed as readily as with the speaker's assumptions?

It would be a mistake to look upon a prejudiced person's talking as a kind of lying with malicious intent. At least there are on record very few case histories in which people admit as much. Indeed, the terrifying mark of the man who speaks the

language of prejudice is his continuous profession of accuracy. It would be almost a contradiction to find a man who believed that a minority group was inferior who also would admit that he was deliberately lying. It may well be true that those sophisticates who use racial antipathies for political purposes know what they are doing. But the people who pick up "the line" with all its departures from acquaintance with the living and the dead are very much different. They take it as "the truth," as "fact" literally and positively.

Nor is it wise to look upon this inference-making as if it were some quaint practice to be corrected by preaching. A man's way of doing things whether walking, talking, or evaluating is something he learned and something profoundly his. What he does may be harmful to others, but if he feels comfortable doing it the effort to persuade him that he must stop is to run counter to his every impulse. Furthermore, if a man has got used to this mixing-up of the factual and the assumptive, why should he be expected to forego it while listening to preaching which merely says he should become aware of it?

When a man has fixed on some notion (that the Outlanders are immoral, that the Uplanders own all the newspapers, etc., etc., regardless of what can be observed), he is not moved to assert that with any tentativeness. He knows what he knows and he is prepared to say so. If one presents evidence to the contrary, it is all too easily ignored or explained away. When a man has a property right in some belief, no matter how he acquired it, he is not to be dislodged from it by saying he has no right to it. That kind of argument seems only to make him tighten his hold, to make him more defensive. A direct attack on a man's beliefs is too often an invitation to a counterattack.

We must not underestimate the personal character of a man's way of evaluating and acting. Should a man over the years find it easy to respond inferentially as if he were responding observationally, he will also make the response with the feeling that what he does is right. To those never taught otherwise, an Inference Statement sounds as real and significant as an Observation Statement. It is this feeling of the worth of whatever is said that gives the statement a quality so immediate that it is attacked only by seeming to attack the person himself. There

is an idea-possessiveness here not easily dissolved because there is nothing in the nature of the talking-evaluating process within the person which is self-corrective.

This, then, is our guiding hypothesis: that in the give and take of human affairs false knowledge about people is the companion piece to prejudice against them. Or to put it another way: a man's proneness to discriminate against people or, at the other pole, to have overly sentimental attachments to them is a function of the degree to which he fails to recognize the character of his evaluation of them.

In short, if a person evaluates other people in terms which reflect his assumptions, he is in effect not talking about the people at all. And the moment a man's talking is unchecked by the hard outlines of life, there is little to stop it from moving to the false and fanciful. He is very much like those ancient mapmakers who would write "Here are Dragons" in areas not yet explored.

When a man is thus cut off evaluationally from contact with people, it is all too easy for him to hate them for what they are not and for what they have not done or to hold them in ties of affection when that is unwarranted. When the faces of people and the contours of things have been obliterated by a rush of words which reflect considerations far removed, then we may be bedeviled by any man's notions no matter how capricious or fantastic. Let a speaker be unhampered by the test of the observational and he is free to speak as he will of what never was. So long as he knows no way to check what he says, he suffers neither doubt nor the necessity of questioning. In that mood, whatever he says takes on the insistent tone of the certain.

Is there, then, any way by which to help a man to the scrutiny of his own evaluations? Can he be coached to face what he has taken for granted? Can he be brought to that self-knowledge which comes when he evaluates his evaluations?

CAN SELF-SCRUTINY BE TAUGHT?

How do people take to this kind of analysis? What difference does it make when they learn something of the character of their talking and evaluating? It would be good to be able to give clear and final answers to these questions. We must be content with something less than that.

Between February, 1946, and February, 1948, approximately 600 people were exposed to the formulations under the heading of instruction in General Semantics. No control groups were established. Only the instructional outline was held constant. The effort was given a very narrow focus: how would people respond to instruction designed to help them to some self-knowledge about their evaluations of other people?

At the outset we could be sure of very little. The working doctrine, i.e., the confusion between Observation and Inferential Statements, the response to labels as if they labelled more than aspects, etc., seemed to make sense by itself.* One could find and analyze many available reports of research in terms of these mis-evaluations. The formulations could be applied empirically to a host of specific situations. One could find examples galore which could be analyzed in these terms. One seemed not to find these modes of thinking at work in people who were not prejudiced. Indeed, they seemed to show explicit awareness of what went unnoticed in people whose antipathies were deepest. We had, in short, a set of ideas which were attractive and which seemed relevant. What could be done with them?

Five kinds of groups were available: adults enrolled in evening classes in an urban university, policemen undergoing special training, grade school teachers, foremen meeting periodically to discuss human relations problems, students in a junior high school. These groups had been organized for purposes somewhat removed from ours, but it was arranged to include from six to

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* For the systematic elaboration of this doctrine see Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity* (Lakeville, Conn.: Institute of General Semantics, 3rd Ed., 1948), Wendell Johnson, *People in Quandaries* (N. Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1946), S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action* (N. Y.: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949), Irving J. Lee, *Language Habits in Human Affairs* (N. Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1941) and *The Language of Wisdom and Folly* (N. Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1949).

ten hours of this instruction, to interview them individually and to test their learning.

The approach in every case was through lecture-discussions on the theme: *how do you talk about people?* We started by saying that a way of talking about others was linked with a way of thinking about them, and that we were concerned with the means by which each person could check his own talking and thinking. We believed that some kinds of talk made more sense than others, and that the nonsensible variety helped cause trouble. We tried to help the groups face this question: is it possible to distinguish between talk which properly evaluates other people from that which misevaluates? We said that our function was to help them use the instrument of verbalization more adequately. It was suggested that this instrument, like knitting needles, fishing rods, screw-drivers, could be used for achievement or damage and that the goal was to help the listeners realize the difference.

The sessions were introduced with a kind of problem approach. Situations were devised to which the participants were asked to respond. The business of misevaluation in statements made was then developed by reference to the responses. The following four are typical of the twelve problems presented though they apply only to the factual-inferential confusion. In order to show something of what we had to work with, each problem is given here with a summary of the initial responses made to it in the adult extension classes. The results from the other groups were roughly the same.

1. A placard was shown on which was drawn a house with the name A. C. Jones written plainly on the door. On the road in front of the house there was a parked car with the name B. Smith, M.D. printed across the side. The 209 adults were asked to write "a factual comment" on this situation. 142 of the papers contained some statements similar to these: "Someone is sick at the Jones house." "Dr. Smith is calling on the Joneses." "Dr. Smith parked his car in front of the Jones house." "The Jones family has visitors." Thirty-two of the papers said in effect that "they guessed" the doctor was in the house. Thirty-five adults wrote that factually it could only be said that a car with the name B. Smith M.D. on it was parked in front of a house with

A. C. Jones written on the door. Thus, only 15 per cent of the adults made clearly defined Observation Statements and 67 per cent made Inferential Statements as if they were "factual comments."

2. A placard was shown on which was drawn a street scene. A man is lying on his back, his right hand covering his right eye. Standing about ten feet away two men with darkly shaded faces and hands and close-cropped hair are looking at the man on the sidewalk. One of these men has his right hand clenched and extended. The other has a noticeable smile on his face. The 209 adults were asked again to write a "factual description, i.e., a strictly informative report" of the situation. 133 of the papers included statements of this sort: "There was a fight," "The Negro knocked the white man down," "Negroes aren't interested in what happens to a white man," "The two men beat up on the one." Thirty-five of the papers contained tentative expressions such as "It looks as if the man was struck," "Maybe they had been fighting," "Do you suppose the man who was down was drunk?" Thirty-one merely wrote about the situation in terms which approximated the above description of the placard. It is to be noted that 63 per cent of the replies were sharply inferential though given as "factual." Every paper which contained statements derogatory to the Negro was clearly inferential.

3. The following story was read aloud: "The 12-year-old boy had been swimming alone about 50 yards from shore. All of a sudden he seemed to be in trouble. He screamed 'Help' and for a moment was lost from view. A man came up to the shore-line, quickly removed his shoes, took three steps into the water when the boy's cry 'Help' could be heard a second time. The man then stepped back out of the water. After looking up and down the shore-line, he turned and left. The drowned boy's body was recovered the next day. This story was told by the boy's grandmother, who from a sick-bed was looking through a bungalow window. She says she called to the man but she thinks her feeble voice may not have reached him."

The group was then asked to write "a statement of the man's behavior in severely factual terms, as if that factual statement were to be submitted to the local Police." The analysis of the

209 papers showed only a slight divergence from the pattern of the replies made to situation 2. One hundred and forty-one papers included statements of this sort: "The man was a coward," "He didn't want to take responsibility for failing to bring the boy in," "The man was like a hit-and-run driver," "He had no human feeling," "He ran because he didn't want to face questions." Thirty-one papers contained tentative statements like these: "Maybe he couldn't swim," "He may have realized it was too late to do anything about the boy," "I wonder whether the man had something wrong with him like a weak heart." Thirty-seven of the papers described the situation very much as they heard it.

4. The following story and instructions were mimeographed and distributed to each person. "Mr. Cohen, back in 1932, owned a shoe store employing seven people. In order to give his unemployed brother-in-law a job, Mr. Cohen fired Bill Johns. Bill had done nothing which might have caused his dismissal. He had been the last of the seven to be hired. Because jobs were scarce Bill was out of work for ten months, then went on relief. Write as much as you wish about this situation *in the most factual way that you can. The more factual your statements* are the better they will be for purposes of this study."

Typical statements on 86 of the papers: "It's a crazy world which gives such a man power," "It's the luck of the draw," "What can you expect from a man with a name like Cohen," "Jews certainly stick together," Sixty-nine papers said in substance that there were no factual statements which they could make which were not already in the story. Twenty-one papers made comments like these: "I really don't know what to say," "Who cares?" "What could anybody do about a situation like that?" On 23 papers the comment was in effect: "I don't know what you mean by factual statements."

It is clear that in this, the last of the twelve experimental situations, a third of the people were becoming aware of something new in their language use and some 10 per cent more had come to feel the need of instruction. Forty per cent were still writing seemingly unaware of the assumptive character of their statements. Again, every derogatory statement about Mr. Cohen or Jews was markedly inferential.

We learned much in these class hours but the following findings seem most pertinent here.

1. There was very little expressed resistance to the instruction. The students came to see that the teachers were giving them no system of beliefs which might be at odds with their "personal truths." They seemed to understand quickly that they were being given "a way of thinking" rather than a set of well-formulated ideological conclusions. They told us over and over that they were being given something which helped *them*. They said they felt encouraged about trying this out on people they knew. The group of junior-high-school students had listened to some sermons on "tolerance" which came simultaneously with the course of 8 hours on General Semantics. When asked to write essays on "Prejudiced People" the "thinking themes" were written about three times as frequently.

If the responses obtained from these people can be trusted, we have here a tactical maneuver which could be of some value in the war against prejudice. When one talks about talking he seems not to be attacking on the familiar fronts. The students did not take on the passive attitude which so often accompanies preaching. Indeed, they became participants in the maneuver itself. When a teacher talks about the kinds of statements made, he is on "neutral ground" where there are few negative attitudes touched off. The teacher sounds more like one teaching how to do something rather than like a propagandist.

2. Some 14 per cent of all the people seemed not "to get it." They expressed interest in the discussions but their replies to questionnaires and in the interviews, and their written answers to questions on the material indicated that they had not been reached. It is not known whether it is possible to get this across to them by other means.

3. When members of the police and foremen groups were interviewed (by people other than the teachers) one month after the course, more than half expressed the opinion that "this was something new," that they "hadn't been given this sort of thing before." They seemed impressed by the freshness of the approach. Some indicated surprise that "ideas about people could be dealt with on such an individual basis." On the other hand, the majority of the teachers group suggested that "there was nothing

at all new in this inference analysis" but they were motivated to try it out "because it seemed usable."

4. Teachers reported greatly reduced tension when students came to apply what they heard to differences of opinion in the class discussions. The questions "Could they be called anything else?" "Is that an inference?" "Is that what could be observed?" put to a member making a sharp statement created a kind of game atmosphere. An example typical of many occurred in one discussion concerned with what people say about Negroes. Two of the participants most vocal in their assertions that "Negroes won't take advantage of education even if made available" were brought to scrutinize those assertions without the antagonism that results in the usual pro and con debating.

5. Approximately 300 of the 600 interviewed, when asked to comment on the value of the time spent, believed that this kind of teaching would have significant use in a preventive program. "If people could be inoculated with this way of thinking they might not so readily accept superstitions about other people," was the way one man put it.

There remains one tremendous question: did this instruction carry over from the meeting room to the home, playground, office, shop and beat? That question was not raised in this study except incidentally. Our primary interest was an experiment in communication. There are indications that in the classroom many people do make the transition from "what people do" to "what do I do?" Students repeatedly affirmed in interviews that they "have begun to watch their own as well as their friends' and relatives' evaluating." Whether that stays with them, whether they keep doing it, and what difference that makes in the leavening of human discord cannot now be said. The effort described in these pages suggests that the six to ten hours may well be but a beginning and that there may be something in all this with which others might also move people to the larger awareness of themselves and those about whom they talk.

There is nothing in our experience which leads to the conclusion that this kind of instruction is unrelated to other ways of bringing people to a more sensitive awareness of the existence and worth of other people. The concern for individuals so basic to democratic living is hardly unique with any procedure. If I

have seemed to focus on *a* way it is in the hope that it might be an addition to our equipment for the achievement of human communion. It might even be a small part of that larger study so eloquently envisioned by Walter Lippmann:

> The study of error is not only in the highest degree prophylactic, but it serves as a stimulating introduction to the study of truth. As our minds become more deeply aware of their own subjectivism, we find a zest in objective method that is not otherwise there. We see vividly, as normally we should not, the enormous mischief and casual cruelty of our prejudices. And the destruction of a prejudice, though painful at first, because of its connection with our self-respect, gives an immense relief and a fine pride when it is successfully done. There is a radical enlargement of the range of attention. As the current categories dissolve, a hard, simple version of the world breaks up. The scene turns vivid and full. There follows an emotional incentive to hearty appreciation of scientific method, which otherwise it is not easy to arouse, and is impossible to sustain. Prejudices are so much easier and more interesting. For if you teach the principles of science as if they had always been accepted, their chief virtue as a discipline, which is objectivity, will make them dull. But teach them at first as victories over the superstitions of the mind, and the exhilaration of the chase and of the conquest may carry the pupil over that hard transition from his own self-bound experience to the phase where his curiosity has matured, and his reason has acquired passion.[25]

CONVERSATION CONTINUED

"This is hardly a brief answer to my question," I said. "It might not even be an answer. But does it suggest that new theme you were wondering about? Is this evaluation idea something about which you might talk?"

"It might be," he said.

"I didn't get to say this before but there was an interesting by-product noticed by those who conducted the courses. They said that because they felt like teachers rather than special pleaders they were strongly motivated themselves. I wonder whether anybody else would have that reaction."

"I don't know," he answered. "Whatever I said would be an Inferential Statement."

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